



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



1. What is Early Achievers? Why is it a focus of the Department of Early Learning?

Early Achievers is Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), a process for supporting and rewarding child care providers for providing high-quality child care. Because so many of Washington's young children participate in early learning programs, it's important to make sure these programs provide children with the best possible start. DEL has developed Early Achievers to help programs offer high-quality care through training, coaching, and incentives that support high quality for children.

Early Achievers is designed to align, support, and build upon other key early learning programs in Washington, particularly WaKIDS, Washington's Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, and the professional development lattice. We know that creating seamless programs for children and families in Washington is key to helping all children grow, develop, and successfully transition from early childhood into early elementary.

2. Who will participate in Early Achievers? Is participation voluntary or required?

Beginning July 1, 2012, all licensed and certified programs will have the opportunity to enroll in Early Achievers. Level 1 is equal to licensing or certification to recognize the critical importance of health and safety as the foundation of quality. Programs voluntarily decide whether they want to participate further and attain Levels 2 through 5. Programs that opt to participate will have a variety of supports and incentives available to help them achieve higher Early Achievers ratings.

Early Achievers, Washington's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS)

This is an exciting time to be in early learning in Washington! As a result of Washington winning the [Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge](#) grant in December 2011, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) will expand [Early Achievers, Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System \(QRIS\)](#), statewide. Early Achievers is expanding beginning July 1, 2012 and will serve the entire state within one year. Please check our website to see how Early Achievers will increase quality early learning opportunities in your community.

3. Do providers who accept Working Connections Child Care Subsidy need to participate?

No. Child care providers do not need to participate in Early Achievers to continue to receive child care subsidy. However, DEL is currently developing a “tiered reimbursement system” in which subsidy payments would be higher for programs that achieve a higher Early Achievers rating. The tiered reimbursement will provide additional incentives and rewards for participation in Early Achievers, but facilities will not need to achieve a specific level of quality to be eligible to serve children on subsidy.

4. How will DEL encourage child care providers to participate?

DEL wants to make high-quality care an achievable goal for all child care programs. To support early learning programs on the path to quality, DEL has three primary mechanisms to programs improve and sustain high-quality care:

- ▶ **Coaching:** Programs that choose to participate in Early Achievers will be provided with coaching through the Child Care Aware of Washington. Coaching is intended to support programs achieve higher quality ratings. Areas for development include:
 - Improving the quality of teacher-child interactions and the learning environment
 - Ongoing child assessments
 - Implementation research-based curriculum and teaching strategies
 - Individualizing teaching and learning, especially for children with special needs or who are having difficulty progressing in certain developmental domains.
 - The University of Washington (UW) is finalizing the coaching models. The training framework is expected to be finalized by July 1, 2012.
- ▶ **Quality Improvement Awards:** Washington encourages programs to increase their quality and make a positive impact on child outcomes by investing in quality improvement grants for facilities that reach higher Early Achievers quality rating levels. Quality improvement grants are flexible, but coaches help programs prioritize areas of need such as classroom educational materials, teacher training, wage supplements, release time, curriculum materials, or parent trainings/supports.

- ▶ **Professional Development opportunities, funds, and supports:** A variety of supports and incentives are available to support programs that employ staff with a CDA/certificate or higher degree, which help them earn points toward the Early Achievers professional development standard.

Scholarships and Opportunity Grants are provided to support participants' ongoing professional development goals once they reach levels three through five. Funding is evenly split between two results-based programs, Washington Scholarships, implemented by Child Care Aware of Washington and Opportunity Grants, implemented by State Board of Community and Technical Colleges.

5. Will the quality ratings be public?

Yes. We know early learning programs will benefit from becoming an Early Achiever and we will promote ratings on DEL's website. DEL will post programs that have chosen to voluntarily participate and that achieved a Level 2 rating or higher. Programs that do not choose to participate (and therefore will remain a Level 1 Early Achiever) will not be publicly listed as a Level 1 program.

6. What are the Early Achievers Quality Levels and what do they mean?

- ▶ **Level 1** is Licensing or Certification that includes all licensed child care centers and family child care, military, tribal, Head Start and ECEAP, and other state-funded programs.
- ▶ **Level 2** is focused on ensuring that program leaders (specifically child care administrators, directors and owners) understand QRIS, the Program Standards and requirements, and the child outcome and school readiness goals of the system. To attain Level 2, programs must complete a self-assessment (the ERS) and attend free trainings that support program improvements

and policy development. Finally, programs must participate in DEL's statewide professional development registry ([MERIT](#)) by creating program profiles and ensuring all employees have an active record of their educational achievements.

- ▶ **Levels 3 through 5** are points-based ratings based on four program standards:
 - Child outcomes
 - Curriculum, Learning, Environments and Interactions
 - Professional Development and Training
 - Family Engagement and Partnership.

7. What are the standards that programs will be evaluated on to determine their rating?

Levels 3 to 5 will be determined on a 100-point system, based on the following four standards:

- ▶ **Child Outcomes** is worth up to 10 points for implementing screenings and assessments and sharing the results with families. Participants choose a screening from an approved list, allowing for flexibility and the unique needs of each program.
- ▶ **Curriculum, Learning, Environment and Interactions** accounts for 70 points and is based on the strength of the curriculum and teachers supports. In this standard, 55 of the 70 points are determined through assessments conducted by the UW evaluation team, which uses two comprehensive assessment tools, the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).
- ▶ **Professional Development, Training and Coaching**, worth 10 points, is designed to align with the education levels identified in the [Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals](#). Beginning with the Child Development Associate, providers

can earn points for having staff who achieve high levels of education continuing through the Master's degree level. To help programs advance in this standard, Early Achievers provides incentives such as tuition reimbursement, scholarship, and other incentive awards.

- ▶ **Family Engagement and Partnerships** is worth 10 points and is based on the research-based Strengthening Families Framework. Programs earn points for completing the Strengthening Families assessment and for providing family supports.

The progression for Early Achievers levels is:

- ▶ Programs that have completed Level 2 requirements and have been working with a coach may request an assessment to achieve a Level 3 to 5 rating.
 - Based on the four standards above, programs that receive 30 to 69 points will receive a Level 3 rating.
 - Programs that score 70 to 90 points will receive a Level 4 rating.
 - Programs that score 91 to 100 points will receive a Level 5 rating.

8. How will Early Achievers improve child outcomes?

Early Achievers is unique in the nation because it was built with the specific goal of improving outcomes for kids. The initial pilot was developed, tested and evaluated by Thrive by Five Washington. Based on Thrive by Five's initial work and findings, DEL worked with UW to make revisions that are shown through research to strengthen instruction and affect child outcomes, with a particular emphasis on children with special needs. DEL will continue to work with its research partner, UW, to ensure the strongest alignment between the Early Achievers standards, the rating levels, and the outcomes for children.